

## Rejoicing Before the Lord

Excerpts from a family sermon by the Rev. Patrick A. Rose

Readings: Leviticus 23:33-44; *Arcana Coelestia* 9296:1.

*“And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days” (Leviticus. 23:40).*

Every year the Israelites had three special holidays. One of these was called the Passover. During the Passover, which was in the spring, about the same time that we have Easter, they remembered the time the Lord had led them out of the land of Egypt.

Later in the year, the Israelites had another holiday was called the “Feast of Weeks” or “Feast of Firstfruits.” After the Israelites had harvested the first crops from the field, they were told to wait seven weeks. Then, at the end of those seven weeks, they had a holiday—they celebrated the beginning of the harvest.

Then, toward the end of the year, at the end of the harvest, after all the crops had been gathered in from the fields, and after all the fruit and everything else had been picked, the Israelites had a holiday called the “Festival of Ingathering.” During this festival the Israelites brought fruit, palm leaves, and tree branches before the Lord. And then, for the next seven days, the Israelites were told by the Lord to rejoice and be happy, and give thanks for the harvest.

We, too, should rejoice when we remember all of the wonderful things that the Lord has given us. And, just as with the Israelites, our holidays are times to praise the Lord and to give thanks to Him for all the blessings He gives us. And it is important that we do not forget that the greatest of the Lord’s gifts are His spiritual gifts, those blessings He brings to our spirits. The three festivals the Israelites celebrated each year were, on one level, a thanksgiving for natural benefits. They gave thanks for deliverance from natural slavery in Egypt. And, having been brought into the land of Canaan, they gave thanks for the natural harvest of food from their fields—for the food they were able to grow in the promised land.

In the internal sense, though, these festivals do not simply represent liberation from Egypt and entrance into the land of Canaan. What is represented in the internal sense is the process of regeneration—the process by which a person is liberated from hell and introduced into heaven.

The Passover itself represented deliverance from evil. The feast of weeks, or firstfruits, represented the beginning of heavenly life—that stage in regeneration when a person is struggling to put the truth he knows into life. The final feast, the feast of ingathering, or the feast of tabernacles, represented that time when the process of regeneration has born fruit—a time when the person is gifted with a will or desire to do only that which is good. This desire to do good comes from a new will, and the whole process of regeneration has, as its end, the goal that we might receive this new will. The new will, the regenerate state, the desire to do only what the Lord commands, is, as it were, the fruit, indeed the full harvest, of the process of regeneration.

Because the feast of ingathering represented the culmination of regeneration, it was a time of rejoicing, indeed a time when the Israelites were *commanded* to rejoice. In the literal sense, it was the time when the work of the year was over. The hard work of the harvest, bringing in all

the food, was completed. It is similar with the process of regeneration. Regeneration, or our part in the work of regeneration, is hard work. We have to fight against evil and falsity. We have to force ourselves to do what the truth teaches us to do. In the end, though, we are blessed with a regenerate will. We no longer have to *struggle* to live the truth. The Lord fills our hearts with love, with love toward Him and toward our fellow human beings. This is a happy state, when heaven itself fills our hearts, our minds, and our lives. And so it was that the feast of ingathering, which represented this state of regeneration, was a time for rejoicing—a time when the Israelites rejoiced for seven whole days.

And this is why we also should give thanks and rejoice. We give thanks to the Lord, not simply for His many natural blessings, but also for the blessings of the human spirit. We give thanks because He has promised that if we obey His commandments, if we follow Him, then He will lead us also out of the slavery of evil and will bring us into the Promised Land. He will bless our souls and fill us with a spiritual harvest—the happiness and the peace of heaven itself.

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